ED 109 443

DOCUMENT RESUME

TITLE	The Use of School Volunteers.	CE 004 291
INSTITUTION	Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Mott Inst. for Community Improvement.	
PUB DATE	Apr 73	
NOTE	10p.; For related documents, see CE 004 292-3; Best copy available - not available in hard copy due to marginal reproducibility of original document	
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE	
DESCRIPTORS	Early Childhood Education; Educational Needs; *Educational Programs; Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; Paraprofessional School Personnel; Personnel Evaluation; Post Secondary Education; *Preservice Education; *Program Administration; Recruitment; School Aides; *School Community Relationship; Teacher Aides; *Volunteers	

ABSTRACT

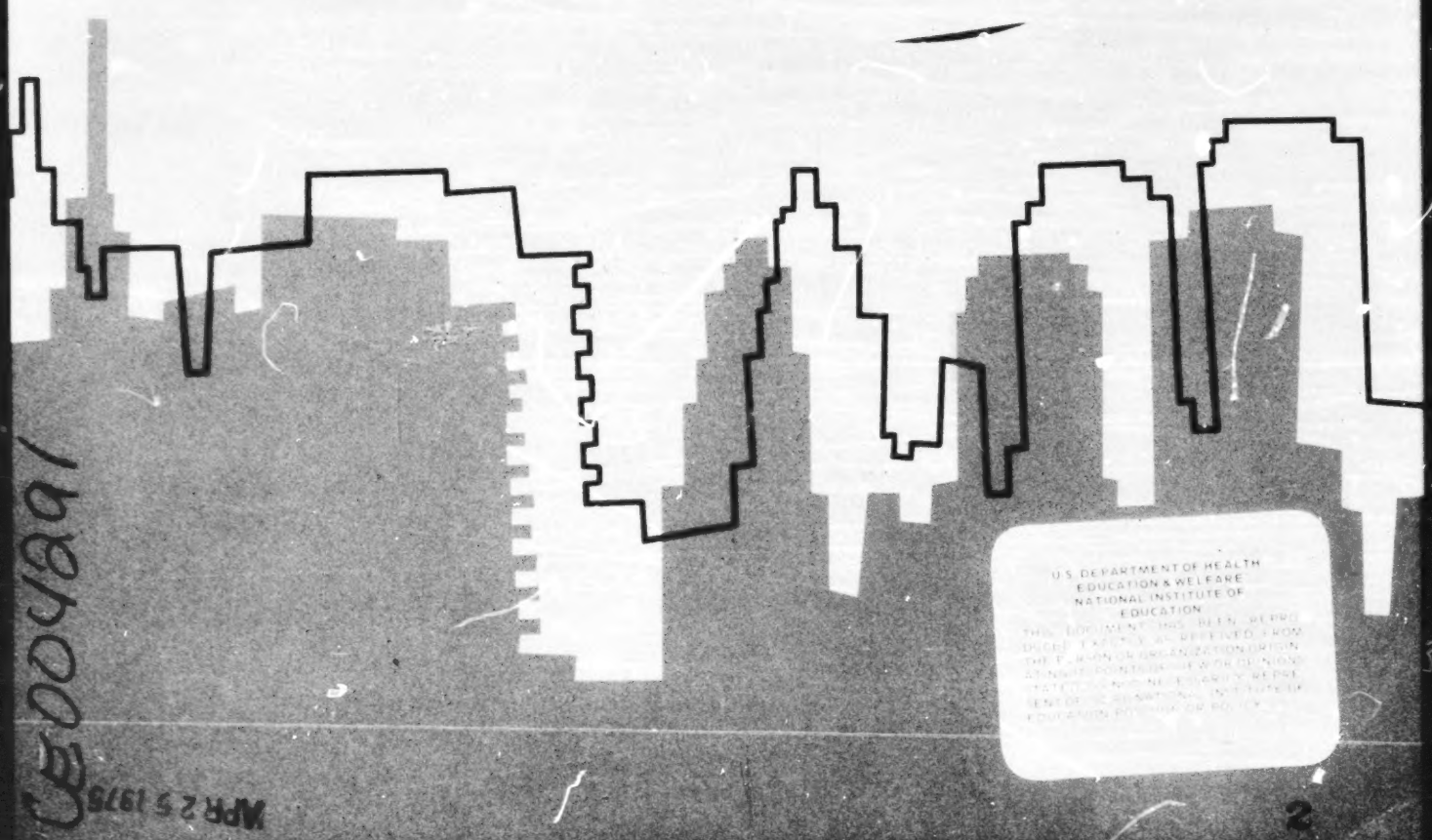
There are three major reasons for recruiting school volunteers: they extend the number of people available to help teach; they bring skills to their tasks that professional educators do not have; they experience positive effects themselves simply in the process of volunteering. The wisest recruitment policy would recruit volunteers having the skills, talents, and interests needed in a particular school. The formulation of a job description listing duties and time commitments is important. Volunteer placement should be flexible. Volunteer program administrators and staffs should conduct orientation programs which will explain the school setting, general activities, and staff's appreciation of the volunteers' efforts. Preservice instruction on the ways children learn would also be helpful. Probably the most important aspect of the preservice training program, however, is the development among volunteers of a feeling of belonging. Volunteer evaluation should be subjective and based on students', teachers', and the volunteers' own estimation of their work. The range of possible jobs which volunteers can perform extends virtually as far as the imagination is able and the regular staff is willing to go. (Author/JR)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED107443

STRATEGIES IN EDUCATION

The Mott Institute
for Community Improvement
MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

APR 25 1975

ED109443

THE USE OF SCHOOL VOLUNTEERS

April 1973
517 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan
48823

WHY USE VOLUNTEERS

The use of volunteers in American schools has a history dating back to the very first colonial schools. Many early schools, in fact, were administered by volunteers. In a sense that is true today -- school board members who formulate policy and make the major decisions are volunteers.

If one traces the reasons why volunteers have been used they include the following:

1) In periods of financial difficulty, volunteers can reduce operational costs.

2) When qualified professionals are unavailable, volunteers are used as temporary substitutes.

3) In small school situations, full time positions are not necessary and part-time help may be difficult to hire; hence volunteer help is used. An example is the volunteer doctor who is available to the football team.

4) Specialized needs often occur on a non-continuing basis and volunteers are recruited.

5) More recently, with the focus on disadvantaged learners, volunteers have been recruited from backgrounds similar to the child's so as to increase the likelihood that the child could be reached.

We take the position that while these may be valuable reasons for recruiting volunteers, there are three much more valid reasons:

1) Volunteers extend the number of people available to help teach. Educators for years have pointed at student-teacher ratios as too high.

2) Volunteers often bring skills to their tasks that the professional educators don't have. This is not meant to imply that we believe a teacher's education is wasted. Rather it is meant to imply that the personalities and needs of young people are so diverse that one just cannot expect to find enough talents and resources amongst a small number of teachers to maximize opportunities for all youngsters.

3) Perhaps more important than all other reasons, however, is the positive effects volunteering can have on the volunteer himself. And if one can't accept such an esoteric value then the public relations value is certainly still there.

We have had enough experience in school districts to know that setting up and operating a volunteer program is not easy. Often times you will question whether the investment of time and resources is offset by any gains. There may be occasions when it would be easier to do the job yourself than to train a volunteer to do it. In the long run though, our experience has been that all the work, problems and paper work are more than offset by the results -- a better community in which to educate children and adults.

Role Descriptions

Unquestionably, the decision to use volunteers in the school is a most significant step. Having made such a decision, the administrator and the staff must then give serious consideration to the ways in which volunteers are to be selected.

People should probably not be recruited simply to fill an undefined role as a volunteer. It would seem wiser to recruit volunteers having the particular skills, talents and interests needed in the school. This suggests the importance of a thorough assessment of the needs of students and teachers in the school, prior to beginning the selection procedure. Ideally the staff should reach some consensus as to the probable roles of volunteers. This, then, may be used as a framework upon which to develop both selection rationale and broadly stated job descriptions.

Recruitment

Armed with such selection rationale and preliminary job descriptions, the staff is now ready to begin its search for prospective volunteers.

The question arises: Where do we go to recruit? Here it would seem that the imagination should be allowed full reign. While the possibilities for locating potentially successful volunteers is almost limitless, some suggestions may be of value. Clubs and organizations within the community are a good place to begin. One might visit the League of Women Voters, for example, and find ten volunteers of good potential in a hurry. Clearly the age range of good volunteers is extensive. Within the same school it would not be surprising to find elementary, junior high and senior high school age students working along side senior citizens; both groups contributing in their own unique ways to a successful volunteer program.

Most of us tend to be somewhat cautious when committing ourselves to the performance of some service. There are some things that we generally want to know before we promise our time and efforts. An important factor for most people is the magnitude of their commitment. If, for example, volunteers are selected with the expectation that they will remain active for an entire school year, many are likely to be reticient. Thus, it would seem wise to specify initially that a volunteer is expected to serve for a shorter period of time, say six to eight weeks, thereafter having the option either to continue or terminate his service. There is comfort in knowing that, if the job is not as rewarding as was anticipated at the outset, there is a built-in escape clause which will more likely prevent any hard feelings among school personnel and feelings of guilt among the volunteers who choose to discontinue their services.

Obviously, this kind of introductory period also allows the school

personnel to exercise their option of not continuing with a person who has been less than effective in the role of volunteer. This might be likened to license renewal time, when both parties have the option of renewing their commitments to one another and together, to the students they serve.

As previously mentioned, the existence of a job description is of great importance. This does not mean, however, that the assessment of needs leads directly into an ironclad decision about such descriptions. Much value may be obtained by including prospective volunteers in the development of job descriptions. In this way, their talents and interests are more likely to be incorporated into their jobs, thus increasing the chances for success of the volunteer program. Such joint planning may have an additional strength. Where prospective volunteers' interests and talents lead them to propose job descriptions and activities which are not in the best interest of students, the opportunity is present for the school staff to modify these proposed activities and to better align them with the needs of the student.

Management of a Program

An effective volunteer program requires thoughtful management and coordination. A wide range of possibilities exists for such coordination. Frequently one volunteer will be both willing and able to serve in this capacity. Ideally such a person should take an active part in the planning stages of the program. Moreover, such a person should evidence a fairly broad understanding of the goals and objectives of the volunteer effort. The school which employs a Community School Director may be able to use him as the volunteer coordinator. His close relationship with both students and adults in the community provides him with information and understanding which give him the potential to be an ideal volunteer coordinator.

Placement

One final recruitment matter should receive the attention of the school staff. This is the matter of placement of volunteers. Placement should be a flexible arrangement initially since there is no guarantee that initial placement will constitute the best possible arrangement. The relationship between the teacher and the volunteer and between the volunteer and the student should be as free of conflict as possible. Where such conflicts do arise, systems should be built into the organizational model which allows for transfer of volunteer personnel with a minimum of embarrassment and hostility.

Recruitment in and of itself is not a sufficient condition for developing a successful volunteer program. Along with recruitment is a strong need for adequate screening. This implies, of course, the elimination of volunteer personnel who clearly would not have a positive, productive influence upon children. But beyond this, one would want to screen prospective volunteers in terms of their apparent motivation. In so doing, one is more likely to be able to differentiate between those who will be consistent and those whose lack of proper motivation may render them less reliable. Moreover, careful screening would seem a prerequisite since the volunteer worker is likely to be privy to information about students

which should remain confidential.

Orientation

Having once recruited and screened volunteers, the administrator and staff will need to embark upon an orientation program. Such a program should be composed of at least three components:

1) An understanding of the generalized school setting in which the volunteer will be working.

2) An understanding of general activities for the volunteer worker.

3) An understanding of the ways the staff and administrator view the volunteer's individual talents and interests, and the ways in which they would perceive them to be used most effectively.

A general understanding of the school setting is worth imparting even to those who live in the school attendance area. The fact that they reside there is no guarantee that they have such an orientation. Certainly one would want to characterize the racial and socio-economic make up of the school. In addition, some coverage of specific problems characteristic of the school might be considered valuable.

Providing a general understanding of the anticipated activities of the volunteers may be a good way to give volunteers a broader perspective of their role.

The need to work with individual volunteers would seem to be strongly indicated. Most individuals will benefit from a session with the administrator, coordinator or teaching staff to lay out the specifics of what the volunteer is expected to do and what the individual perceives his role to be.

Record Keeping

An effective orientation program should probably include matters of daily routine. Thus, volunteers might be asked to make a note each day in the office of their arrival and departure. While the intent would not be one of wishing to check up on the volunteers, it might suggest the necessity of maintaining consistency and a businesslike approach to the school's operation. Volunteers might be asked to prepare a record in which the specifics of their daily contacts with the children could be summarized and evaluated. Moreover it would seem advisable for teachers and/or supervisors to record their reactions to the efforts of the volunteers on a somewhat regular basis.

Preservice

Volunteers who are to work directly with students could most likely benefit from some preservice instruction in the ways children learn.

While not wishing to suggest a heavy course in child psychology, it would seem that informal discussions centering around methods of asking questions effectively, and developing volunteer-student rapport would be of value. Moreover, the preservice training should allow time for volunteers to prepare for their new responsibilities. Just as the teacher must prepare materials for student use, so volunteers can and should be encouraged to do the same. Nothing can be more frustrating to both volunteer and teacher then for the volunteer to be present in the classroom and have nothing to do. The volunteer might therefore, be given some preservice time for developing a "Fireman's Kit" consisting of games, work sheets and other materials which he or she can use with children on those occasions when the teacher has not prepared a specific task for the day. Certainly the teaching staff should be a part of the planning and development of such materials. However, it would not be unreasonable to expect particularly capable volunteers to develop some expertise in diagnosis of learning problems and to become rather skilled in preparing learning materials which are directed toward the particular cognitive needs of the children with whom they work.

How To Keep Volunteers

Probably the most important aspect of the preservice training program is the development among volunteers of a feeling of belonging. If their role is not perceived by them as being of value to the operation of the school, the longevity of any volunteer program is placed in serious jeopardy.

Having recruited and oriented the volunteer workers to their jobs does not constitute a sufficient condition for the successful maintenance of a volunteer program. Like teachers, volunteer workers require regular inservice training. Perhaps the greatest benefit which obtains from such training is the continued reinforcement that occurs to volunteers when they gain reassurance of the value of their services to the school program. Regular monthly meetings in which volunteers and staff can meet and confer, monthly newsletters covering the activities of the volunteers, and other means of communication are invaluable. Much of the value may accrue from including volunteers in the inservice meetings, seminars and workshops designed for the regular teaching staff. Certainly, a sense of belonging can thus be fostered which serves to solidify the volunteer workers and which reaffirms their value as a part of the instructional staff.

Evaluation

Evaluation of volunteer workers is not a process which takes place on a specific day or date. Rather it is an ongoing process which begins at the recruitment stage and extends throughout the volunteers' tenure in the school. While some consideration should be given to the success of students in relation to the efforts of the volunteer, it must be born in mind that such things are most difficult to measure and may, at times, be misleading. Perhaps it is better to ask the questions:

1) Are the classroom teachers happy with what the volunteers are doing?

2) How do the students seem to respond and relate to the volunteers presence and interaction with them?

3) Is the volunteer happy in his work?

The answers to questions such as these, while subjective in nature, may provide more accurate answers than any empirically based evaluation scheme.

What Can Volunteers Do?

Clearly, an efficiently operating volunteer program has the potential for greatly expanding the success of the school's instructional program. This potential, however, can be limited by lack of an imaginative program. The effective use of volunteers requires a rather broad outlook toward the kinds of jobs they can and should perform. Certainly, clerical help is of great benefit to school personnel; and, it would seem that many volunteers would feel most comfortable contributing in this way. For others, clerical work would not be adequate to sustain long-term interest. For such people other means for providing service must be identified.

The range of possibilities extends as far as the imagination is able, and the regular staff willing to go. Volunteers can serve a vital function by supervising recess and lunch periods, thereby freeing teachers for planning. They can help to round out the instructional program by aiding in or even leading one-to-one, small and large group instruction. They can be of particular help by leading follow-up lessons which are designed to further reinforce learnings which have been presented by the regular teacher. Thus, the teacher is freed to work in greater detail with those students who require additional introductory input.

Volunteer workers can be of invaluable assistance to special personnel in the school. Thus, the community school director, librarian, speech therapist, music teacher, physical education teacher, art teacher and other such personnel can more effectively meet the various needs of large numbers of students. Furthermore, in addition to such long term assignments, volunteers can be most helpful by assisting with holiday parties, by sharing their particular talents and skills, by talking out their various careers, countries, cultures, vacations and the like. A small group of volunteers can be of tremendous assistance to a teacher or teachers planning and taking a field trip.

Virtually all teachers have need of help in the preparation of classroom materials. Volunteers can be very valuable in the performance of activities such as producing games and other innovative learning materials both at school and at home. Old reading books, no longer of value in their present form, can be cut up and reassembled as story books for individualized reinforcement of reading skills. Volunteer fathers can provide invaluable service by offering their construction and repair skills. Innumerable "around-the-school" jobs can be filled by volunteers who are willing to produce weekly newsletters, escort visitors, and register new students.

The use of volunteers, while anything but a new idea in education, has unquestionably reasserted itself in the schools in the last few years. Whether it remains a viable approach, and whether its potential for improving the quality of education is fully realized depends largely upon how imaginatively we, as educators, implement it within our schools. As with all matters educational, time will tell.